

Abstract

I conceived the direction of this research with the thought that in the development of a musician, the elaboration of a doctoral thesis represents a defining stage of their evolution, at a conceptual and aesthetic level, a stage in which the accumulated experience is harnessed through the process of comprehension and communication of the research results, in this way the knowledge and artistic competence advances towards a superior level.

I have directed my attention towards the field of chamber music because, on the journey of searching for my musical identity, this is the form where I think I have managed to channel and mature my abilities the most. The reason why I have chosen to deal with this sub-genre – the clarinet trio – is due to the fact that between 2008 – 2017 I was part of the trio Axis Mundi, this experience leaving a substantial mark on my artistic exploits, considering both the inner architecture, but also the dimension of the outer sphere.

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1. CHAPTER I. The clarinet trio: genesis and crystallization

2. CHAPTER II. From score to performance – reference points of the interpretive process

3. CHAPTER III. Personal interpretation experiences

4. CHAPTER IV. Creative-interpretive masterclass: compositions on absolute premiere

After researches, consolidations and integrations of knowledge, I deemed appropriate to use in the title of the thesis the wording "clarinet trio" because I have noticed the formula clarinet-violin-piano tends to become standard; this is why in this moment it is justified and convenient to adopt a concise denomination instead of the descriptive one "trio for clarinet, violin and piano." We find this justification in two aspects: on one side in the consolidation of the repertoire for this formula and on the other side the previous occurrences offered by designations such as string trio (and not trio for violin, viola and cello), piano trio (and not trio for violin, cello and piano), piano quintet (and not quintet for two violins, viola, cello and piano).

I have identified the emerging character of this timbral configuration through the fact that although the dawn of this sub-genre is noticeable during the genesis of the string quartet or of other chamber formulae that became standard, a consistent proliferation of the repertoire for the clarinet trio is recorded no sooner than the XXth century and continues today, so the process of consolidation is ongoing, at the moment.

Through this thesis I am aiming to track the historical development of this subgenre, the accumulation of dedicated repertoire during successive stylistic periods, to highlight the core values of this repertoire, but also my individual experience of cultivating the clarinet trio, as a pianist member of an ensemble with a stable activity carried out in the course of a considerable amount of time. Obviously, the perspective from which I have addressed the interpretive topic is first of all the one of the pianist, without avoiding the natural collaborative component of chamber music with other instrumental partners.

In the first chapter I have traced the general contour of a historical and typological perspective of the space that had generated its completion. The research direction is based on the observation that the clarinet, violin and piano formula begins from the idea of derivative timbre and tends towards standardization – the quantity and quality of existing repertoire is decisive within this status. I have set about by illustrating considerations related to types of chamber formations and their crystallizing, from formulae which "copied" vocal Renaissance ensembles to their variation and finally their standardization. In the first half of the XXth century we come across the trio for clarinet, violin and piano as a well-defined ensemble, idiomatically and in repertoire.

To imbue rhythm to the historical tenor, I have delineated four subchapters:

I.1. From Renaissance to Baroque – in the dawn of chamber music, I have dedicated this subchapter to a retrospective from the beginnings of the chamber genre towards the period in which the actual object of our study discovers its own place and physiognomy.

I.2. The classical synthesis: Hereafter on the history timeline, I have delineated a short but definite painting of the evolution of chamber music during this time, emphasizing the fact that starting with *Kegelstatt* Trio KV 498 for clarinet, viola and piano in [E-flat major](#), composed in 1786, the clarinet becomes valid in chamber music, and the origins of the clarinet-violin-piano trio, its outline is set about with the timbre combination of clarinet, viola and piano. During this era of classical music, the Czech composer Johann Baptist Wanhal writes in the year 1775 a *Trio for clarinet, violin and piano* in E-flat major, registered as op.20, no.5. We cannot be certain that this could be the first trio written for this timbral combination, but other historical evidence is lacking. We can simply intuit the beginning of this process, by stating logical conclusions which can be deduced from certain historical contexts. In this context, it is bound for Johann Baptist Wanhal's Trio to be included in the embryo stage of the evolution of this type of ensemble.

I.3. Time Jump: the XXth century: I have not dwelled in reflections about the evolution of romantic chamber music typologies, because as soon as the historical juncture of the birth of the clarinet-violin-piano trio was identified and the formative connexions were established and the actual instance was proclaimed, a detailed excursion into a historical period drifting away from continuity for this type of ensemble is not relevant to the research objective. Still, we have identified one clarinet-violin-piano trio from this epoch, *Serenade for Violin, Clarinet and Piano* by Waldemar von Baussnern, despite the fact that this work is not representative enough to consider that it marks a natural evolution from Wanhal's Trio.

In the chamber music of the XXth century we encounter the auspicious context for crystallizing the clarinet-violin-piano trio, specific works, be it transcripts and adaptations of personal pieces, from which we name the most important works, belonging to leading composers of the era:

- Igor Stravinski - *The Soldier's Tale* (1918), arrangement
- Alban Berg – *Adagio for clarinet, violin and piano* (1926) – arrangement for the second part of the Chamber Concerto
- Aram Khachaturian – *Trio for Clarinet, violin and piano* (1932)
- Charles Ives – *Largo for violin, clarinet and piano* (1934)
- Darius Milhaud – *Suite for clarinet, violin and piano*, op.157b (1936)

- Béla Bartók – *Contrasts for clarinet, violin and piano*, sz.111 (1938)
- Ernst Krenek – *Trio for clarinet, violin and piano*, op.108 (1946)
- Francis Poulenc - *L'invitation au château* (1947)

I.4. An excursus on Verdehr: in this subchapter I submitted a presentation of this ensemble which had a defining impact in popularizing the trio. To hold a persuasive perspective on the blooming of this chamber music genre in the second half of the 20th century, it is enough to mention that for the American ensemble Verdehr Trio were commissioned more than 200 works. At the same time, this endeavour led to the establishment and crystalizing of this subgenre, such that we highlight the contribution brought by the interpreters from their relationship with the composers is a generating element which, across the history of music sparked the creative force of the composers, ensuring the continuity and the natural evolution of some musical genres.

The second chapter entitled "**From score to performance – reference points of the interpretative process**", is written as a synthesis, a recognition or even a possible source of inspiration related to the path of the musician from the moment of decision to study a particular piece until its rendition on stage. We suggested an ideational arsenal where the interpretive pursuit is a two-way street: towards the within, where the connection to the self takes place in the intimacy of the inner space, but also towards the exterior, manifesting in the unique way in which each musician creates the link with the surrounding world and manages to communicate to the public an artistic message.

Following we dwelt on facets which we deem ineluctable when approaching the process of composing music: - the character of the musical piece

- Tempo
- Technical difficulty
- Contemporary music notation
- Dynamics
- Sound dosage

II.1.1. In what concerns the issue of tempo and of character, I decide to touch on it coordinately, as usually a tempo notation is, according to rule, one of the decisive clues in regards to the character of the music, these two aspects sum a compact continuum, in so far, a well understood and well felt character will generate and fulfil the tempo in which it is required.

II.1.2. As Władysław Tatarkiewicz accentuates in *A history of six*, the Greek techné, τέχνη, means the same as the latin "ars", meaning art, therefore any perfection of technique represents also a refining of means of highlighting the content, the expressive meaning of music.

In my experience I have identified more types of situations in which we can face difficulties, and finally I touched upon the theme of time management along with internal and external discipline in cultivating balance in our own artistic lives.

II.1.3. I deemed appropriate to devote a subchapter to contemporary music notations, because when undertaking contemporary music repertoire, almost inevitably we encounter special symbols, which require to be examined and comprehended in detail and in spirit. In order to elaborate this aspect, by diffusing the gained experience with the trio *Axis Mundi*, I deployed my not a few exposures of this kind in the context of the contemporary music ensemble *AdHOC*.

II.1.4. Concerning sound dosage, I developed the idea according to which this is an element pertaining to the internal alchemy of music and it stands for a test of refinement, of development and constant auditory attention of the interpreter, a distinct sound adjustment having the capacity of creating great differentiation in the perception of the musical meaning, and the aspect of dynamics refers to states and sound processes, this playing a part to facilitate their materialization.

The third chapter, **Personal interpretive experiences**, includes two parts, the first a presentation of the trio *Axis Mundi*, and the second an analysis of the works from the repertoire of the ensemble. These are analytically scrutinized coming from a perspective of subjective experience and it records a chronological history of the genre, from compositions, from the first, then the second half of the twentieth century, up to topical compositions. The breadth and level of detail of each analysis varies considerably, on the basis of objective, historical importance of the compositions – but also from a subjective assessment scale contrived from personal experience, better said that of the ensemble in the company of which I have covered this itinerary

III.1. *Axis Mundi* Trio was launched in the year 2008 at the chamber music course of professor dr. Vera Negreanu. Similar to the chronical validation of the typology of trio for clarinet, violin and piano – which proceeds from the idea of derivation - keeping the value and temporal ratio, we can affirm through an analogy that the trajectory of the trio *Axis Mundi* starts from the idea of extension and reaches stabilization through derivation. Consequently, the embryo stage of the ensemble was assembled during high school when, together with my classmate Aurelian Băcan, we decided to collaborate as a clarinet-piano duo, despite the fact each of us belonged to a separate chamber music ensemble, duo which progressed until the 3rd year of university. A gifted adviser who does not lack an overall vision, professor Vera Negreanu had convinced us beginning with 3rd year at university to experiment chamber music in the context of a trio, hence came about the expansion of the duo nucleus, first in the formula of clarinet, viola and piano. After the violist left the country, our teacher directed us towards the idea of derivation of the trio through the inclusion of a violin. The violinist Rafael Brutaru, a fellow-student, joined us and after a semester's collaboration and a friendship assembled, each of us knew that we wish and have the necessary energy to generate this ensemble.

We opted for the name *Axis Mundi* because this phrase best illustrates the place which music occupies in our lives. Next came winning first place at the competition "*Saverio Mercadante*" from Bari, Italy, in the year 2008, and then a series of craftsmanship courses which offered the opportunity to work with awarded musicians like: György Kurtág (Ungaria), Răzvan Popovici (Germania), Diana Kettler (Londra), Mara Dobrescu (Paris), Theo Wolters (Olanda), Janis Maleckis (Riga), Reto Bieri (Elveția).

In the last three years our violinist was Radu Dunca, since Rafael Butaru had taken up his residence in Bucharest. In parallel, all the three members – during the time which the violinist of the ensemble was Rafael Butaru, along with the time when the activity of the trio unfolded together with the violinist Radu Dunca – were also members of the contemporary music ensemble AdHOC, under the musical direction of conductor Matei Pop and mentorship of composer Adrian Pop.

The concert activity of the ensemble was more and more defined through recitals and concerts given in festivals or chamber music seasons, which implicitly resulted in an enrichment of the repertoire. Accordingly, besides works which mark genre reference points like the ones authored by Béla Bartók, Aram Hacıaturian, Darius Milhaud or Alexander Arutiunian – without omitting the clarinet-violin-piano version of the famous *Histoire du soldat* by Igor Stravinski, the repertoire was enlarged by opuses from newer composers - Gian Carlo Menotti, Wolfram Wagner – and certainly a number of works belonging to Romanian composers, some of which written precisely for our trio. It can be said that the trio *Axis Mundi* had contributed at enhancing the autochthonous repertoire in this direction.

Stylistically, the ensemble's repertoire shows a varied palette, concentrating the defining features of XXth century music. For the first half of the century, they go from expressionist and avant-gardist nuances to the neoclassical clarity or the modal colours of the national modern school. For the second half, the mixing of composition solutions includes aleatoric, repetitive, polystylistic, post-serial or fusing methods.

The analyses from subchapter **III:2. Analytical reports and interpretive reflections** follow the stages of assimilating the musical work by the ensemble through my subjective experience. I included suggestions referring to solving some moments correlated to coordination on the whole, but also some which address, even favour some solutions for the pianist, solutions which were accurate and worked for me, without assuming that they would function as a general rule. I gave special emphasis to the symbiosis between the technical-interpretive work and the comprehension of the musical text with concern for structure, linguistic elements, aesthetics and style, together with strategies for work applied to the labour of the ensemble, essential for a unifying conception of the composition. In my opinion it is extremely important for interpreters to comprehend these aspects because they make up the main factors in artistic communication.

The works are classified in three periods: those from the first half of the XXth century, those from the second half of the XXth century, and at last the works from the first decades of the XXth century are mentioned.

In the last chapter of the research, **IV. Creative-interpretive workshop**, I directed my focus towards the works premiered, including the experience of meeting with a composer to prepare a premiere, this being a special moment with various implications – for the interpreter, but for the composer too. All these works were written by Romanian composers and all premieres were prepared during meeting respective composers, which counts for an ideal circumstance.

Within this "theme" of the dialogue with the composer, in our experience can be distinguished seven instances which will result from exposing successively the experiences.

IV.1. Roman Vlad – New Proverbs (2012): the experience of encountering the piece for solo clarinet by composer Roman Vlad opened to the interpreters new imaginative

horizons: from the idea of the composer Adrian Pop (which appealed the author), the work *New Proverbs*, initially a collection of five miniatures each titled after a Romanian saying, was transformed from a solo to a trio, in which the clarinet interprets the musical part, and the pianist and violinist take on the role of actors, mimicking a sketch for each proverb. Thus, dramatic action is added to the original version of the piece.

IV.2. *Group Portrait - ad Honorem Magistri Cornel Țăranu (2014)*: represents a miniature cycle through which the disciples of maestro Cornel Țăranu - Șerban Marcu, Iulia Cibișescu Duran, Tudor Feraru, Dora Cojocaru, Ionică Pop, Ciprian Pop – brought a musical tribute to their teacher on the occasion of him turning 80. *Group Portrait* was interpreted by the ensemble *Axis Mundi* during the festival "Musical Autumn in Cluj", XLVIII edition, 2014. This concert was cast and organized by composer Adrian Pop, disciple of the maestro, who also envisaged this "Group Portrait". Each piece in its individuality illustrates a microcosmos in itself, with distinguishing writing and theme, which comes across from the title: *Toccata, Plus infinit, con tenerezza, Mnemosyne, Ghirlandes en résonance, Kandaon*. This suite brought for our band the opportunity of a collaborative mosaic, and the experience was even more revealing as they occurred almost simultaneously, thus in a short amount of time. Although each of the five works from the suite are character pieces, it was noticeable how the collaboration with each composer moulded the piece in a particular direction, appertain to the personality and the requirements of each. Consequently we dealt with three distinct situations: some which exhibited the general vision of the composer over the work and so the elements which fulfilled this vision were meticulously worked out (Șerban Marcu, Iulia Cibișescu-Duran); others in which the general vision of the composer was displayed, but the way in which this was accomplished was left to the creativity of the interpreters (Tudor Feraru, Ionică Pop); or the scenario in which the composer gave total freedom to the performers, with the intention to discover himself how the piece which he composed comes to life, viewing it as a confidence building exercise towards the performers (Ciprian Pop).

IV.3. Aurelian Băcan - *Les Kaches - esprits des rochers (2011)*: is a piece which was composed due to the requests of the *Axis Mundi* trio members, an initiative encouraged by the ansamble's mentor, professor Vera Negreanu, all the more we were positioned in an ideal constellation, having as ensemble member a composer. Obviously, on account that Aurelian Băcan was part of the ensemble *Axis Mundi* was an asset, because by taking the double position of composer and interpreter, we had the opportunity to benefit from explanations and constant feedback in each stage of studying the piece; each character or character variation was discussed, getting an inside look, along with specific methods of technical effectuation. The entire process of constructing the piece felt similar to a workshop, where we attempted to decide over some details (features related to dynamics, dosage of sound planes, even technical solutions where necessary etc.), hence to define the most convincing and alive version of the piece – more so because we envisioned the possibility of other groups to include in their repertoire this work.

The trio was a tribute for professor dr. Vera Negreanu, and as the composer confesses in his doctoral thesis, it is by far his most played work, that he composed up until now, as it was included in recital programs of the *Axis Mundi* trio 11 times, with its premiere at the Romanian Music Festival from Iași, the XVth edition, on the 21st noveber 2011.

The composer chose the title of the piece following a group concern, initially related to the need to find a name for our trio. We can state that the personalities of the members of the trio inspired the choice of this programmatic theme for his composition, the strongest feature being "the brave ones", which characterizes the musical spirits which are called in Armenian mythology "*kaches*".

In conclusion, I traced the main outcomes of my interpretive experiences, the implications involved in the responsibility of performing in a chamber music ensemble, the regard for contemporary music, the experience inside the contemporary music ensemble *AdHOC* having a considerable contribution, its inclusion in the individual repertoire, that of a band, but also that of students, as well, regardless of age – a vision which I pursued to realize in my didactic activity.

The three appendices include the list of works dedicated to the ensemble *Verdehr Trio*, the list of *Axis Mundi* concerts, along with recordings of the trio I was part of.